

Can Poetry

1411

THE BATTLEFORD COLUMN

Versified Memories
of a Queen's Own Corporal

in the

NORTHWEST REBELLION

1885

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Professor G. H. NEEDLER

To

TOM MARSHALL

and

RALPH ROSS

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OTTER

THE BATTLEFORD COLUMN

I

We heard the call, — 'twas years ago
[three score
"Duck Lake!" resounded from the far
[Northwest;
Fanatic still, as fifteen years before,
Riel returned on his deluded quest,
Red Men to join his Halfbreeds egging on:
Red River then, and now Saskatchewan.

II

Good men went with us, we were pals
[together,
And steps were springy as we marched
[away;
They've mostly fallen like leaves in
[wintry weather.
And few our number as we meet today.
Salute to them who shared with us the
[toil
But sooner shuffled off this mortal coil!

III

We'll let them live with us again tonight
While Memory's magic wand
[rejuvenates us.
Makes every dimming eye to sparkle
[bright.
And back to Eighteen-eighty-five
[translates us.
Tales will be told which growing age
[endears, —
Improved the vintage with the lapse
[of years.



IV

At middle night the word was flung at me
That shook me rudely from a sleep
[divine :
"Queen's Own are ordered to Winnipeg!
[Now see
That all your men are on parade at
[nine."
I rubbed my eyes and countered with
["Good God!", —
And hustled out to rouse my corporal's
[squad.

V

March twenty-eight the muster, —
[Saturday:
Longest on strength had the first
[choice to go:
On Monday morning we were on our way
With rifles shouldered for the coming
[show.
From Armouries to Station, to entrain,
Toronto cheered godspeed to our
[campaign

VI

By C.P.R., Toronto to Carleton Place,
Then up the Ottawa valley past
[Biscootasing.
Till "end of rail" abruptly cramped our
[pace
And faced us with a barrier amazing :
A savage land capricious Nature framed,
Now Winter to majestic silence tamed.

VII

The C.P.R. just then was incomplete,
Hiatuses were in it, numbering four;
Indeed, it was an engineering feat
To blast a road at all through that
[North Shore.
And it is needless to remark, perhaps,
No pullmans functioned yet between
[the gaps.

VIII

The first, of forty miles, we made in
[sleighs
Collected there to hasten our transition.
This even verse but little sense conveys
Of bumpety bumps that marked the
[road's condition;
A wild night ride it was, with frequent
[dumps.
Varied with sprints to limber up our
[stumps.

IX

The toiling teams next day found rest,
[and we
Saw rails again. That wild where did
[of yore
Moose, wolf and bear hold rival
[sovereignty,
Heard man's rude engines tell their
[reign was o'er.
When night was come, with moon and
[myriad stars,
We climbed aboard a waiting train of
[cars.

X

The cars were flatcars, boarded at the side
To keep you from going sideways
[overboard;
The ends were free; the view was
circle-wide,
Better than observation-cars afford;
While all the open sky was requisitioned
To make them adequately air-conditioned.

XI

Like blanket-hooded ghosts in the weird
[gleam
Of the full Easter moon — the mercury
At twenty-odd below — we snorted steam
Into the frosty night in symphony.
And if by luck a man began to snore,
He slid to be our footstool on the floor.

XII

The night did pass somehow. O noble Sol,
You did knock down the moon and
[giggling stars.
And made at last your mounting rays to
[fall
Upon the riders on those damned
[flatcars.
Never, O never, was it better timed,
The hour when o'er that eastern verge
[you climbed.

XIII

Yet — base ingratitude! — we soon must
That you, Old Sol, could not the sport
Of pouring down all day that blinding
On weary devils hiking through the
Miles two-and-twenty westward o'er the
You smote us in the face. — it wasn't

[swear]

[forego]

[glare]

[snow.]

[ice]

[nice!]

XIV

The shortest distance twixt two points,
Is the straight line between. I doubt it,
Old Euclid never hiked across that bay,
And yet it was the best that we could do
Ice-bound, snow-clad, of Lake

[they say,

[for]

[Superior.]

XV

You lay that night wherenever you were
[able,
Crawled in somewhere for better or for
[worse;
Some pals with me found fitting inn a
[stable.
When every man was working like a
[horse.
You couldn't look to such sequestered
[post,
Just over night, to play the perfect host.

XVI

He would be damned if his tired team
[would haul
Another load across the bay that day!
The Colonel and his party, they might
[all
Just go to hell, — 'twas all he had to
[say.
With that he padlocked fast the stable
[door,
Sought his log cabin and was seen no
[more.

XVII

Not any man in all the universe
Had ever spoken to the Colonel so.
The Colonel, — well, his language was
[much worse
When he would let vituperatives flow;
He had a quite select vocabulary,
Transmogrifying every adversary.

XVIII

He simmered down on letting off some
[steam.
And lost no time in giving a decision :
He'd give him half an hour to rest his
[team
And let his schedule undergo revision.
The Q.O.R. rearguard must cross that bay
And join the Column ere the close of day.

XIX

Those thirty frosty minutes lingered past
While we did various stunts to keep us
[warm.
And when the terminus ad quem had
[come at last,
We tapped the cabin door just to inform
The teamster he should hitch up — and
[no fooling! —
To run us over, — such the Colonel's
[ruling.

XX

No door was opened. from teamster ne'er
[a word
To say he would revise his first
[intention.
When our unfavourable report he heard,
The Colonel's words were hardly fit to
[mention.
They meant : Smash stable door, hitch
[team and sleigh.
Night will be here before we've crossed
[that bay'

XXI

No sooner said than done! — The team
[meanwhile]
Had fed on oats and hay to their
[contentment].
And when we hitched them up in proper
[style],
They didn't show exhaustion or
[resentment].
Bobsleigh and team were ready in a trice
To move downhill to where we took
[the ice].

XXII

Climbing aboard, the Colonel, good old
[scout],
Perched on the edgeboard. As we drove
[below].
The board turned sharply in and he
[turned out]
A backward dive into five feet of snow.
The teamster should have had the
[tailboard in].
And obviated thus the O.C.'s spin.

XXIII

Good discipline suppressed our risibility
To see our O. C. take that somersault;
We heaved him slowly back to visibility,
Explaining it was all the teamster's
[fault.—
'Twas just as well the teamster wasn't
[there
To see the Colonel's language split the
[air.

XXIV

The team was not exhausted when by
[night
They'd pulled rearguard and Colonel
[across the bay;
The teamster got them back, no doubt
[alright,
His wrath, too, tempered by the extra
[pay.
Humane the teamster was, but no
[diversion
Must bottleneck our should-be-fast
[excursion.

XXV

Some rail, a gap, more rail, a gap again, —
Eleven miles and nine, — O welcome
[shock!
Believe it or not, of real cars a train
Absorbed us on arrival at Red Rock!
Vale! Avaunt! Farewell, O thou North
[Shore!
No syncopated rail-routes any more!

XXVI

We slept! O sweet restorer, balmy Sleep!
O morphic, metamorphic sleep sublime,
Sound, heavy, fathomless, profound and
[deep!
(For Rip van Winkle's snooze we
[just lacked time.)
"My blessings on the man", says Sancho
[Panza,
"Who invented sleep!" — Amen!
[Sleep out the stanza.)



XXVII

Nor eats nor sleeps to date could well
[be said
To be of sumptuous regularity :
One highlight was a midnight table spread
At a lumber camp extemporaneously :
Fat pork and treacle, buns and pies
[galore,
With steaming teapots! — Come, Boys,
[have some more!]

XXVIII

A thousand miles from home! And now
[another
Thousand will take us westward
[on so far
That we'll have other troubles than to
[bother
About what happens on the C.P.R.
We'll bid adieu to the long iron rail,
And nothward strike on foot the prairie
[trail

XXIX

'There is a station we remember well,
The place where first they dumped
[us on the plain.
The C.P.R. has named the place
[Qu'Appelle.
As you may note in passing on the
[train.
It was a godforsaken rendez-vous, —
But there was compensation in the view

XXX

The Prairie! Lo! It is, it is the Prairie,
This wonder vast that now I first
[behold.
Near close of day the world's great
[luminary
Flooding the rolling ocean with its
[gold;
My eyes drink deep the golden overflow.
All self is lost in the enfolding glow.



MIDDLETON

XXXI

Latrines are things of stern necessity
Where troops are camped for any
[length of time;
And so I found myself but little free
To gaze enraptured on that scene
[sublime.
My first "fatigue" as corporal was to pick
Five men to dig those trenches double
[quick.

XXXII

Forgive my mention of the circumstance.
It's just because in retrospect I see
What men of note my party picked by
[chance
Were destined all in later life to be :
A doctor, judge, professor, bishops twain
Got started right trench-digging on the
[plain.



POUNDMAKER

XXXIII

With base of operations at Qu'Appelle,
The strategy G.H.Q. had worked upon
Had us go too to see that they got hell
Down along the South Saskatchewan:
But saving Battleford gave prior work,
And so our route was shifted with a jerk.

XXXIV

By train they shot us west another spell
— Two hundred miles — nor sad we
[were we weren't
To linger longer frigid at Qu'Appelle,
But soon to hit the trail north from
[Swift Current,
With message to Poundmaker: "Will
[you, please,
Statim from Battleford call off your
[Crees!"

XXXV

Our Column on the march! The rising
[ground
Might now and then give fore and aft
[the view
Of horse and foot and wagons as they
[wound
In devious curve past knoll and prairie
[slough :
A two-mile serpent crawling daily on,
Coiling to rest at dark, uncoiled at dawn.

XXXVI

Snow-patches dotted still the ground,
[but lo!
Springing triumphant from the prairie
[floor
A million crocuses their petals show,
Singing, with us, of winter's bondage
[o'er;
In all their multitudinous beauty spread,
Heedless of warring men's discordant
[tread.



XXXVII

Unnumbered bison grazed of old this [plain,
Coming and going with each season's [call;
Now mile on mile the fields of golden [grain
Before the reaper in the autumn fall :
We saw the deep-worn paths to the [drinking-place,
And bones still bleaching from the [hunter's chase.

XXXVIII

When tents were up 'twas alright [overhead;
But lingering winter kept the prairie [damp,
As we knew nightly when we made our [bed
Hard by some slough where they would [pitch the camp.
At morn the groundsheets must be [pulled with care
To leave the frosted ground without [a tear.

XXXIX

A few weeks later, what a change was
[wrought
When summer took possession of the
[scene!
'Twas not just warm, the days were
[devilish hot,
And night brought welcome respite in
[between..
No tents were pitched while we were
[on the move,
Our spreading canopy the stars above.

XL

What leaden slumber wrapped us as
[we lay,
Too weary long to listen to the swoop
Of nighthawk darting on its insect prey
Ghostlike unseen above the prostrate
[troop!
"Get up! Get up! Get up!" — short
[night was done,
And with the light our march again
[begun.

XLI

There is an art in sleeping on the ground;
Whether your corp is angular and
[hollow.
Or in smooth curv'ng lines of beauty
[wound
After the model, maybe, of Apollo,
You fit corporeal protuberances
Into the varying terrain's sinuous chances.

XLII

We didn't work on any eight-hour day, —
At times it might be all the twenty-
[four;
We hoped we earned our fifty cents
[of pay
And couldn't strike to make it any
[more.
The soldier isn't backed by Union rules.
And never gets a chance to chuck his
[tools.

XLIII

A new-made corporal may put on some
[swank :
The day will come when he, could
[he contrive it,
Would more than willingly undo his
[rank,
And just demote himself again to
[private.
A Corporal's Guard — three men —
[will show him what
A prize with those two bally stripes
[he got.

XLIV

A frosty night at the South
[Saskatchewan :
A Corporal's Guard was called to
[close the ring
About the camp. I was the two-
[striped man
Proudly detailed to do the novel thing.
Three men to put in sentry turn aright,
To shoot potential prowlers in the night.

XLV

You know the mathematics of the case?
You just take one plus two and
[multiply
By eight, — those hours you see
[make up the space
Of day and night as round the clock
[they fly.
The day-half of a Corporal's Guard is
[fair, —
It's posting men at night that makes
[you swear.

XLVI

You've posted you man out there on
[sentry beat
(O might I take his place to keep
[awake!);
The two in the tent beside you slumber
[sweet,
Huddled in blankets till their turn
[they take;
While you, poor devil, if you close an eye,
"Asleep on-duty!". — A firing-squad,
[you die.

XLVII

For a change you pray that some
[dare-devil brave.
Upon his bloody scalping business
[bent,
Might pass your sentry, — how would
[you behave
To halt his operations in your tent?
Would those two sleeping scoundrels
[there protect you?
Or, dead in slumber, let him just
[dissect you?

XLVIII

To pass the time you bead your chain
[of sins.
Swearing, at least they don't
[deserve this night.
You muse on have-beens and on might-
[have-beens
Till debits, credits dancing blur
[your sight :
All in a mad mosaic, one by one,
Things you might, could, or would or
[should have done.

XLIX

Past midnight — brain is giddy — a
[double murder
Would give that brace of snorers
[their quietus!
A Lady named Macbeth — they never
[heard her —
She did it in that famed dramatic
[treatise!
— But no! You couldn't wash your
[hands, — and then
Another firing-squad — you're dead
[again.

L

Tardy Aurora in her chariot hurls
At last a light on prairie and on river,
And the full Day his flag of life unfurls
As it hath been forever and forever.
The glory of that dawn is your reward, —
Forgot the nightmare of a Corporal's
[Guard.

LI

Hardtack and pork and beans and bully
And bully beef and beans and pork,
Contributed to Battleford's relief
By keeping Otter's Column on the
Coffee and tea appeased the thirsty.
And, water lacking, filled the water-

{beef
hardtack
track;
throttle
bottle.

LII

LIII

Once only Tom's inventive genius stuck,
The bottom knocked clean out of
[his cuisine;
It was the day that the Dead Hills we
[struck,
No scrap of fuel or water to be seen;
We chiselled off ourhardtack in the raw,
And chewed dried apples to employ
[the jaw.

LIV

Our trail struck Eagle Creek one day,
[to find it
For wagons perilously near too deep;
Or course the Scouts and Mounties
[didn't mind it.
We hikers couldn't take it at a leap;
Clothes doffed, held high, we waded
[the chill tide.
Danced off the shivers as our pelts we
[dried.

RJ

LV

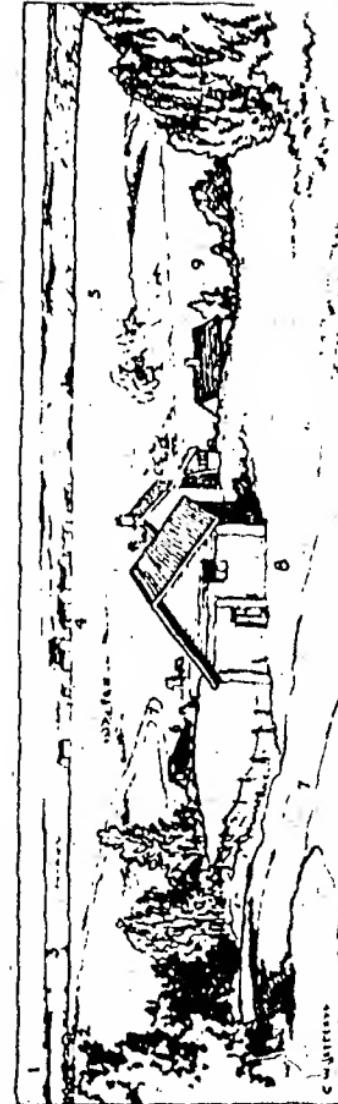
Our pace rolled up ere long the prairie
[trail,
And when one day the Column coiled
[at dark,
But three short miles to go, and we
[might hail
The winning of the long expected
[mark.
How should we find them — succour
[long delayed —
Huddled for shelter in the Fort's
[stockade?

LVI

Temptation was to take the risk and scout
The three miles farther under veil
[of night
To spot, perchance, the braves who
[danced about
The fires that sent aloft the lurid light
Reflected in the welkin's flaming hue
Beyond the sloping ridge that hemmed
[our view.

1 NORTH BANK OF SASKATCHEWAN RIVER
2 VALLEY OF SASKATCHEWAN RIVER
3 SEAS BETWEEN RIVERS
4 VALLEY OF BATTLE RIVER

OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE



1 NORTH BATTLEFORD 2 GARRISON ROAD 3 VALLEY OF SASKATCHEWAN RIVER 4 POLICE BARRACKS 5 STARS BETWEEN RIVERS
6 BRIDGE OVER BATTLE RIVER 7 ROAD TO BATTLEFORD FROM SOUTHERN BOUNDARY OF BATTLE RIVER



LVII

But prudence counselled to await the
[dawn. —
Jocund we strode the gentle height
[ascending
Whence eager eyes the scene might
[feast upon,
That told our hurried march had
[happy ending.
A loud Te Deum the freed watchers sing,
To hear the Column's nearing bugles
[ring.

LVIII

The widespread valley we looked down
[upon
That April morning was a joy to see :
On yonder side, the great Saskatchewan
And here the lesser Battle; in the V
Between their mingling streams the
[wooden wall
Stemming the Red Men's bloody carnival.

LIX

This side the Battle River the H.B.C.
A post had planted many years agone.
To which had gravitated steadily
A group of other traders one by one;
At length the evolutionary consequence
Was District Governor and Residence.

LX

Before the bloody rapine of the Crees,
On warpath now since news of Duck
[Lake Fight
And Frog Lake Massacre, the refugees
Escaped with life alone by hasty flight
To the Fort's shelter, whence they'd look
And see their homes and stores go up
[in smoke

LXI

The plunderers didn't fire all offhand, —
Why cut unnecessarily the fun!
It was a pleasant pastime that could stand
Repeating, so they touched off one
[by one :
Free show staged nightly by the
[whooping devils.
While owners helpless watched the
[fearsome revels

LXII

There was a School, to help the Indian
[youth
To make from bow to plough the
[hard transition:
It hadn't yet gone up in smoke, — in
[truth
Our Column was a timely prohibition.
But it was smashed and plundered, in
[and out,
Some active fowl had fled the general
[rout.

LXIII

One day I entered the dismantled house
And stood a while in silent
[contemplation
Amid the ruin of the wild carouse,
Its every room in utter desolation:
It will be picturesque — you'll not
[deny it —
What's left behind an Indian drunken
[riot.

LXIV

A thing I saw there, passing strange
[to tell, —
A small reed organ had escaped the
[ravage!
Did silently the choir invisible
Speak from those keys to charm and
[soothe the savage?
Some greater Medicine Man's more
[potent charm
Reduce to palsy the uplifted arm?

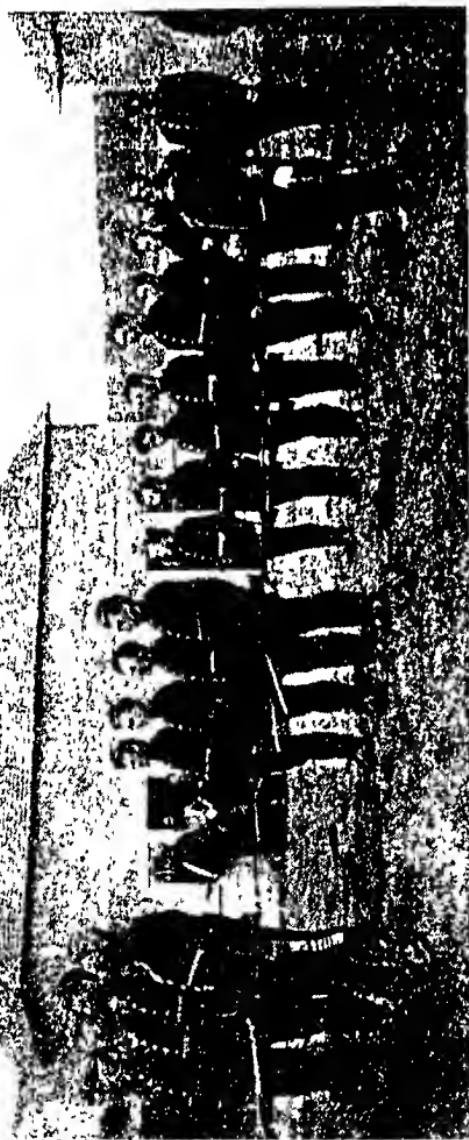
LXV

Amid the feathers of a ripped-up bed
And broken furniture promiscuous
[flung,
Torn leaves around in wild disorder
[spread
Of Gospels printed in the Indian
[tongue.
A fitting relic of the mad carouse,
A volume all unbroken lay, — *Bleak*
[House!

LXVI

Great-hearted Dickens! How that
[name's romance
Did fill the silence! Yet to me unknown
How to that corner of the world some
[chance
The living semblance of himself
[had thrown.
Six hundred hailed our coming, of
[them one
Did boast his very flesh and blood, —
[his son.

CAPTAIN DICKENS' DETACHMENT N.W.M.P.



LXVII

Now Captain Dickens of the N.W.M.
[Police.
With a detachment of two dozen men,
Was stationed at Fort Pitt, and lived
[in peace
Among the Crees of Big Bear's
[country, — when
The Frog Lake Massacre all too
[plainly told
T'were vain to try the tiny post to hold

LXVIII

'Tis a wonder how he got away, and how
Down the great riever, with all his
[men on board,
Through blocks of ice steering the
[leaky scow.
He made the ninety miles to
[Battleford
He had what is denominated "guts".
They said : "Surrender!", — he
[retorted: "Nuts!"

CUT KNIFE HILL



LXIX

Destined we were ten weeks to dedicate
Within that zone to many an operation
That didn't leave us time to vegetate
Or think we were just off on a vacation.
High grew the stakes, as the stern
[game was played.
And ere it ended must a price be paid.

LXX

Seven men lay dead one night beside
[my tent
"Reconnaissance in force to Cutknife
[Hill";
I will not pause minutely to comment
On trying obstacles o'releaped with
[skill.
The threat was turned; Pondmaker,
[sly offender.
Sought presently a parley for surrender.

SURRENDER OF POUNDMAKER



LXXI

Last clash at arms on our North
[Continent
Twixt Red and White, the curtain
[here was rung
On the long drama; the fading light
[now spent,
Here fell the Red Man's goetter-
[daemmerung
A fitting stage the spreading prairie's
[sward
By waters rune-wise whispering
["Battleford"]

LXXII

The painter's brush has fixed th'
[historic act :
The Chief's small band; the officers
[surround
The G.O.C., in portraiture exact;
The Pipe of Peace between them on
[the ground
Pathetic scene it was, — one to dictate,
The other bide inexorable fate.

LXXIII

Our camp was shifted after Cutknife
[Fight
Across the Battle to the level plain
To westward of the Fort. Our grand
[delight
Guard duty, — guards and guard again!
To keep the V-shaped terrain all
[protected,
A line of rifle pits the streams connected.

LXXIV

What thoughts were his, in prison walls
[now pent
With four sub-chiefs and the mad
[slayers twain
From his band self-confessed, proud
[head so bent
Of him who life-long ranged the
[boundless plain!
Poundmaker musing, smoking, squatted
[there
As oft the guard-room vigil I might share.

LXXV

'Tis plain I must by-pass an episode
Or two, lest I should let my story swell
To too great bulk, and bog me on the
[road;
For instance, I can hardly stop to tell
How brave Tom Marshall trained an
[Indian Chief,
Or Sergeant World damned that damned
[pudding-thief.

LXXVI

An Indian warrior is a sight to view,
His make-up of exquisite artistry,
Face camouflaged in paints of lurid hue,
All wrought to hypnotize the enemy.—
Our dames and maids daub nails and lips
[and cheeks,
Themselves remaking into rival freaks.

LXXVII

It should be said, not every Indian brave
Is dressed like every other, — not at all.
He swears he'll not be any tailor's slave,
But always just an individual.
"One only!" is his motto, and to that
He'll stick, from moccasin right up to hat.

LXXVIII

Chief Moosomin, for instance, wore for
— It was a formal call on our O. C. — [best
A long black broadcloth coat, red shirt,
[grey vest,
And buckskin leggings fashioned
[cunningly;
Round his tall beaver hat a band of green
Studded with eagle feathers might be seen.

LXXIX.

An army's belly can't be let go empty;
For that, you know, is what it marches
[on;
Hardtack et cetera's not much to tempt
[ye,

But barrels had to follow Middleton
Up to Fort Pitt; myself was one of forty
Detailed to be the steamer's escort party.

LXXX.

A boat of sorts she was, the old
[Sternwheeler.

A thing unique to thread the upper
[stretches
Of western streams, through sandbarred
[channels feel her

Undaunted way; keelless, in draught
[she fetches
Three feet or less; a stubnosed, squatly
[craft,

Her wheel a cylinder revolving aft.

LXXXI

Tobogganing down, there came a sudden
[jolt]
One day that caused a bit of
[consternation,
A sort of *sotto voce* thunderbolt
Telling of interrupted navigation;
Is this old craft, thought I, so keen
[for heaven
To wreck herself and us, unwarned,
[unshiven?

LXXXII

We calmed to see the captain's unconcern:
The flat sternwheeler can't negotiate
The difficulty of a sudden turn
In the swift stream; head-on she
[charges-straight
Into the bank, backs out, — the current's
[force.
Swings the bow round, and she resumes
[her course.

LXXXIII

Howe'er so great the wisdom that the pilot
Accumulates in any season's running,
~~There isn't any use for him to file it~~
For use next season; all his pilot [cunning
Can do, is make a likely guess offhand
For deepest channel through the shifted [sand.

LXXXIV

Predestined on some shallow place to stick
X-times a day on every downward run,
She carries tackle to perform the trick
Of getting loose, — which isn't always [fun;
He had his choice, the foundered [navigator,
To stick and starve there, or to extricate [her.

LXXXV

She's stuck! — Cranes swing; slides
[swiftly to the ground
On either side the bow a giant spar;
They strike the sand, the pulley ropes
[race round
The spinning capstan; so above the bar
She hoists herself, backing with wheel
[reverse
Perhaps she's free. — or drifts on
[something worse.

LXXXVI

Now speed is king, the pace is lashed to
[fury
By truck and car and plane, and so
[you see she's
On Mississippi, Saskatchewan, Missouri
Put in the show-case labelled
[*Extinct Species*.
At last we get it rough, Old Time's the
[dealer.
So *Ave atque vale*. Old Sternwheeler!

LXXXVII

Meantime from Edmonton precariously
Working his way adown the rampant
[river
Came Gunner Jingo, on the wily Cree
A knockout wallop sternwise to deliver;
He found it wasn't just an easy nut
To crack, Big Bear entrenched at
[Frenchman's Butte

LXXXVIII

Batoche o'erridden, captive now Riel
Whisked southward to Regina to await,
In the blank solitude of prison cell,
What yet might fall from the hard
[hand of fate,
From Battleford upstream the G.O.C.
Joined General Strange at Fort Pitt
[presently.



BIG BEAR

LXXXIX

Riel, Poundmaker now eliminated,
Remained Big Bear alone of the Big

[Three:

But vasty spaces must be penetrated
If you would sight the disappearing

[Cree.

The G.O.C. himself, so keen to find him,
Got bogged, and nearly left his boots
[behind him.

XC

In case that he might try to make the
[border,

Fleeing before the Middletonian wrath,
To Otter at Battleford came sudden order
Northward to dash, and so to bar his

[path :

An artful dodger was old man Big Bear,
And ne'er a footprint left he for us there.

XCI

Hearing our fare was drab, folks in
[Toronto
Sent up of eats a wagon-train
[prodigious,
Such viands choice as you would wish
[or want to
Titillate a palate most fastidious.
But, tell that tale of teasing Tantalus,
For, rotten luck he hadn't one on us.

XCII

You'd almost swear old Middleton by
[chance
Had heard of this, — 'twould make his
[mouth to water —
And that he must such thing
[discountenance
As what a proper Field Force didn't
[oughter.
That very day came order to prepare
Our nothward dash to ferret out Big
[Bear.

XCIII

Officers have privileges — if they take
[em.

God knows they should have some
[to balance us:
Some opportunities have they — if they
[make 'em —

And generally seem to come out plus.
We could take nothing with us, — a
[Commission
Could boxes with the baggage
[requisition.

XCIV

Our Varsity half of Company No. 4
Boasted also students of divinity,
And one of these was pretty sure to score
Where nerve was needed, — yes, or
[asininity,
He'd try to pry into obscure theology,
And had a nose for Officers' ideology.

XCV

That fateful day, when we had reached
[the landing,
Waiting our turn to take the steam-
[boat ferry.
It so befell that we were idly standing
A while beside the baggage, where
[some very
Mysterious boxes, too, the crossing
[waited : —
Our nosing theolog investigated.

XCVI

Not long, until the keen inquisitor
Some rations quite heretical contacted;
His skill, with no pale thought-cast
[sicklied o'er.
All kinds of delicacies soon extracted.
But time was up! What he had there
Pried loose, could not be nailed again
[so slickly
[so quickly.

XCVII

When he was told the boxes had been
With, the Colonel preached a spicy
Old Testamental epithets unhampered
Our Christian pal in his dark bosom
And none obliged the O. C. with who

[tampered]
[sermon:
[than vermin.
[hid it,
[did it.

XCVIII

We thought the Colonel, when he'd
Would call it square and
But no, no, no! That was just the
Of props to buttress up our rickety
Till late at night,, to make the day's
We navvied a damned steamer full of

[had his inning.
[rehabilitate us.
[beginning
[status.
[measure good,
[wood.

XCIX

The Column's northward march began
[with dawn.
The Colonel soaked us all the blazing
[day:
Next to the Scouts and Mounties in the
[van
He stuck us, where pretence of danger
[lay.
Deploying, closing, doubling, swearing,
[solemn.
We did full twice the day's march of
[the Column.

C

All day we concertina'd right and left,
The Colonel just made sure we'd not
[forget it;
He never learned the author of the
[theft.—
—We learned some wisdom as we swore
[and sweated
The lesson that 'twas then, as now 'tis,
[true,
The many pay the follies of the few

C I

We didn't reach the pole, but our
Was north; two hundred miles or so
Showed us of streams and lakes a
Jackfish and Turtle and, farthest
Belike, as we swinked, or cooled off
The Chief knew more of us than we
[direction
[of search
[large collection, —
[north, was Birch
[with a swim,
[of him.

C II

An exile from his band, a sad King Lear
With but a little boy for company,
He did slip through, — but soon to
Led by a Mountie to captivity.
I saw him at Prince Albert as we
A sight for pity, eagle caged at last.
[re-appear
[passed, —

CIII

We hustled down again to Battleford,
Not, to be sure, with Big Bear to
[deliver;
Ten Thousand Greeks scarce more to
[joy restored
By "Thalatta!" than we by the
[great River.
July the First it was, Dominion Day,
And rumours floated of our homeward
[way.

CIV

Down the swift stream, from Fort
[Pitt coming fast,
That morn two steamers rounded
[into view;
Startled we were, as we descried half-mast
On one the flag that in the sunlight
[flew;
And sad we were, when soon the
[message spréad :
The Midlanders' loved Leader there
[lay dead.



MONUMENT TO LT-COL. WILLIAMS OF THE
MIDLANDERS

CV

I thought how last I saw him. — Thus
[it fell :
"Main Guard turn out!", our
[challenge "Who goes there!"
Met him, Grand Rounds to know the
[watchers well
Were mindful of the sleeping camp
[in care.
With a kind word at seeing all was right,
He spurred his mount and vanished
[into night.

CVI

After a run of eight hundred miles or so —
The latter half his waters' rolling
[deep —
Old Man Saskatchewan says : "This
[lazy flow.
First thing I know, will put me off
[to sleep.
So he breaks into nine miles of
[galloping,
His Rocky Mountain youth remembering.

CVII

The Rapids leave a thousand swirling [pools
Along their shores, with moiling [fish alive,
Huge, numberless; you ask, by what [strange rules
Of competition such a host survive.
No sense they seem to have, of jaws [voracious,
And all is food to fill those maws [capacious.

CVIII

A halt to let some following troops [o'ertake us
Gave us a day or two impatient [leisure,
Wherein arose the question, how to [make us
Some pastime to turn boredom into [pleasure,
So four of us made up an expedition
With tackle primitive to do some fishin'.



CIX

Old Isaac Walton would outlaw such
[slaughter]:
A fragment of your shirt-tail for a
[bait],
They're on the jump before it strikes
[the water],
And 'twas a stunt the strike to extricate.
In half an hour we had a hundred pound
Of those fool fish yanked out upon
[the ground].

CX

Two saplings through the gills, we
[strung the whales],
As back to camp the trail again we
[found];
Believe it or not, — heads
[shoulder-high, the tails
Of some were dangling fairly to
[the ground].
A thunder-shower drenched us to the
[skin],
And night had fallen as we came
[trudging in].

CXI

We found a camp-fire with a
[nighthawk party;
They took our invitation, we took
[theirs;
Each saw the other tickled with the
[hearty
Exchange effected straightway of
[our wares;
'Twere vain to say which for the barter
[most did,—
Their Hudson's Bay rum punch, or fish
[we roasted.

CXII

There is, I wot, an Angler Incomplete
Will envious designate my story
[phony,
Or Doubting Thomas call it indiscreet
Wanting corroborative testimony.
Well, they just didn't, sixty years agone,
Accept those fish from Old Saskatchewan.

CXIII

In streamlets trickling from the glacier,
[snow.
Then roaring cascades, for a moment
[pent
In placid mountain lake, again to go
On eager wandering through a [continent,
Saskatchewan, thy deepening waters roll
From Rocky Mountain to far eastern goal.

CXIV

Five hundred miles midway upon thy
[tide.
Our crowded craft an easy burden
[speeding,
Saskatchewan, at length we homeward
[hied,
Our strange adventure like a dream
[receding;
Grateful, to thy lone shores we waved
[adieu.
As thoughts in tune with hurrying
[waters flew.

CXV

His flowing waters to a great inland sea
Now given, the Old Saskatchewan at {length
Finds rest from his long eager race,
Joining with comrade streams his [and he,
Ere long moves on with easy massive {mighty strength.
To merge in the immensity of Ocean. [motion

CXVI

A day and night we crossed that inland {sea.
From River's mouth to Selkirk [labouring slow.
Straining for home, — a strange [flotilla we
Two steamers filled, two barges [each in tow.
Tossing like corks as wind-lashed {waters swelled
Night-long. — by grace of heaven the [cables held.

CXVII

He babbled daily on the sun-parched trail
Of opportunities 'somè day to follow,
Of cooling beverages, an endless tale
Of iced John Collinses that he would
[swallow:
He seized his chance — from the first
[Selkirk bar
His comrades bore him to the baggage car.

CXVIII

In Winnipeg the kindly welcome met
Lacked just one thing of what might
[be desired, —
The unpaved gluey streets so boggy wet
Our show-parade came near to
[getting mired;
But mutual attachment fixed firm roots,
Though mud was working to detach
[our boots.

CXIX

Fort William and the Soo and Owen
Marked next our route; for by the
New line of steamers now a way was
To dodge the memories of those
Those gaps are closed : now men shall
See what we saw and did on that
[Sound
[C. P. R.'s
[found
[damned flatcars.
[nevermore
[North Shore.

CXX

Far off to port it lay, as through the
The *Athabasca* plowed across the deep,
On deck or cabin floor smatched
For hours befogged, the Captain
Where lay the passage into Sainte Marie.
[night
[we might,
[spells of sleep.
[couldn't see

CXXI

Next Huron, Manitoulin, Georgian Bay
To Owen Sound. A leap from sea to [land.
E'en hospitality was now delay,
When Welcome Home was looming [close at hand
In gravitational acceleration
Our thoughts went plumb to North [Toronto Station

CXXII

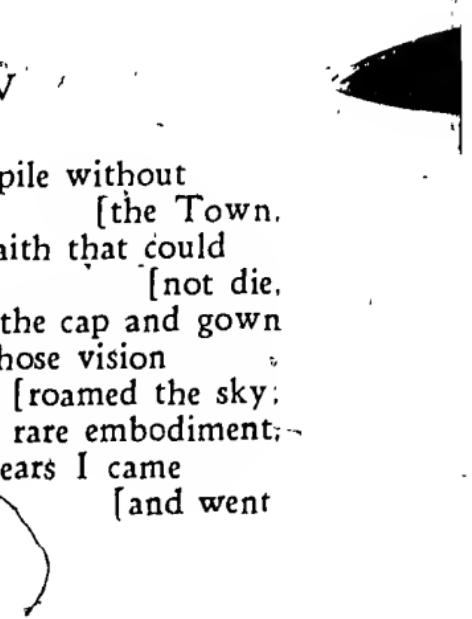
The Town was smaller three score [years ago.
But home-fires then kept just as [brightly burning
As now for thousands from the bigger [show
In shiploads to their native shores [returning.
Four years, four months, — for storm- [tried youths the same
Affection swells the welcoming acclaim.

CXXIII

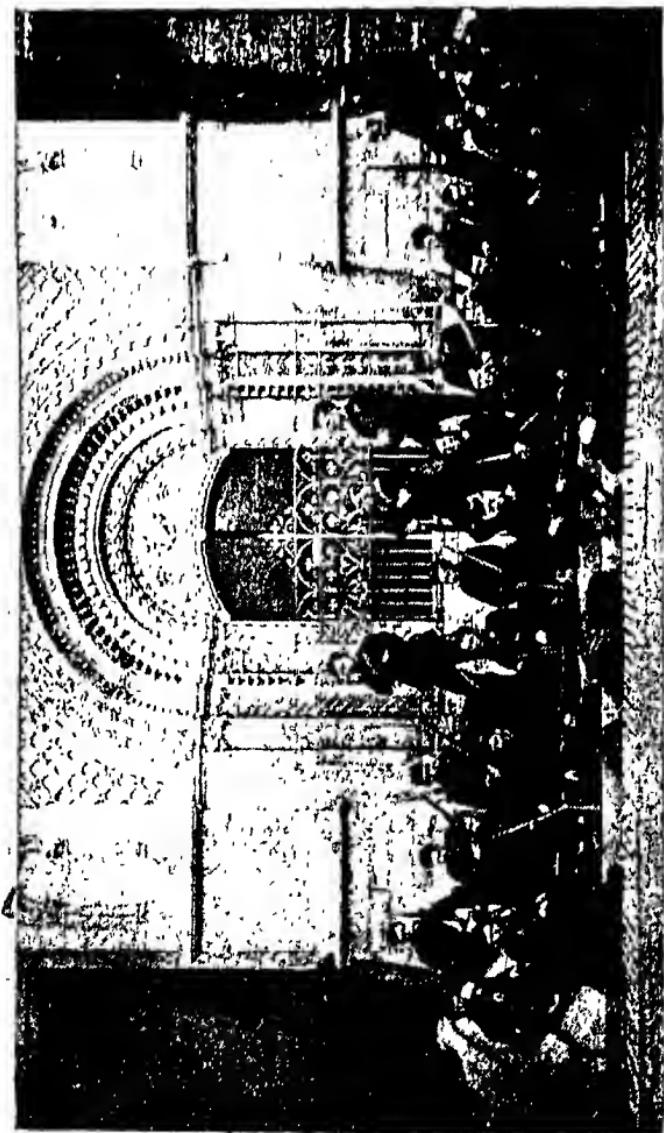
Bouquet of violets set by maiden's hand
The muzzle of each rifle tipped, as we,
To echoing notes of Queen's Own
[Bugle Band,
Down through the peopled lane
[passed thrillingly
To the old Armouries. — Four months
[since when
We sallied forth! And now 'tis Home.
[Again!

CXXIV

There stood a Norman pile without
[the Town.
Builded by men of faith that could
[not die,
A house for masters of the cap and gown
And ardent youth whose vision
[roamed the sky:
Of strength and beauty rare embodiment:
Within its halls four years I came
[and went



VARSITY HALF NO 4 CO'Y Q. O. R.

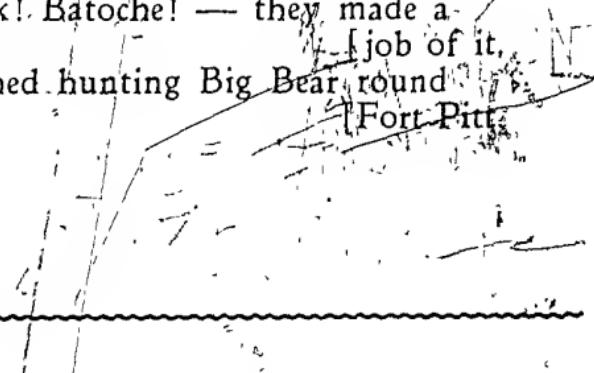


CXXV

Ere parting, to that College porch we
[came,
We Varsity men of common
[countersign,
That its rare sculptured arch might
[give the frame
To picture made for sake of auld
[lang syne.—
They most have crossed the bar, — yet,
[six are we
Who keep the tale of that leal Company.

CXXVI

Of Grenadiers, of Midlanders,
[Winnipeggers
In Middleton's command I can't
[much tell;
Suffice, they were a bunch of husky —
[beggars
Who rushed that day and rounded
[up Riel.
Fish Creek! Batoche! — they made a
[job of it,
And finished hunting Big Bear round
[Fort Pitt.



CXXVII

Of General Strange, — Macleod to
[Edmonton
In sleet and mud, communications cut,
Downstream in leaky barges — what
[a run!
Till Big Bear stood him off at
[Frenchman's Butte.
The wild adventure's told, henceforth
[to live
In Gunner Jingo's thrilling Narrative.

CXXVIII

When sometimes faithful Memory
[leads me down
The long, long vista of these
[vanished years,
Soon as the misty veil aside is blown
A figure well beloved reappears :
Otter it is that through the mist I see, —
Otter, the Bayard of his country he.

CXXIX

With him again we're west and
[northward speeding.—
Sometimes the going just a little
[rough—
Yet rough and tough not all too
[greatly heeding.
If only we can get there soon enough:—
Cooped up while homes were fired and
[war-whoops roared.
Six hundred hailed Otter's Column
[at Battleford.

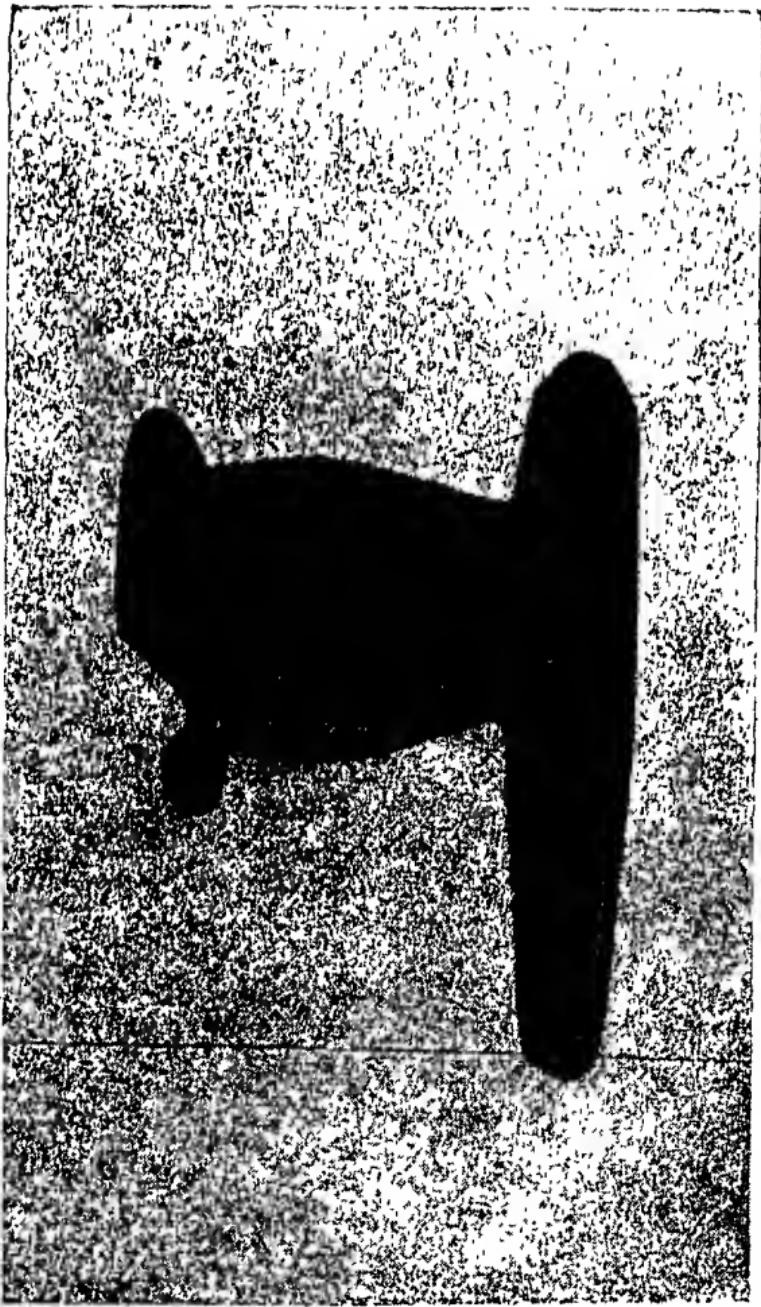
CXXX

Trials far other flood the world today,
Undreamed-of in our world of
[Eighty-five;
Our weapons and equipment stowed away
But as museum relics still survive.
Our Snider-Enfields and our Gatling
[guns
Are just pea-shooters if the game is Huns.



CXXXI

And yet, when Old Man History takes
[his pen
To tell the tale of Eighteen-eighty-five,
Perchance he'll spare one flourish for
[the men
Who kept the faith and saved their
[souls alive, —
Who smote the serpent, kept their
[country one.
And looked courageous to the rising sun.



POUNDMAKER'S PIPE

CXXXII

POUNDMAKER'S PIPE

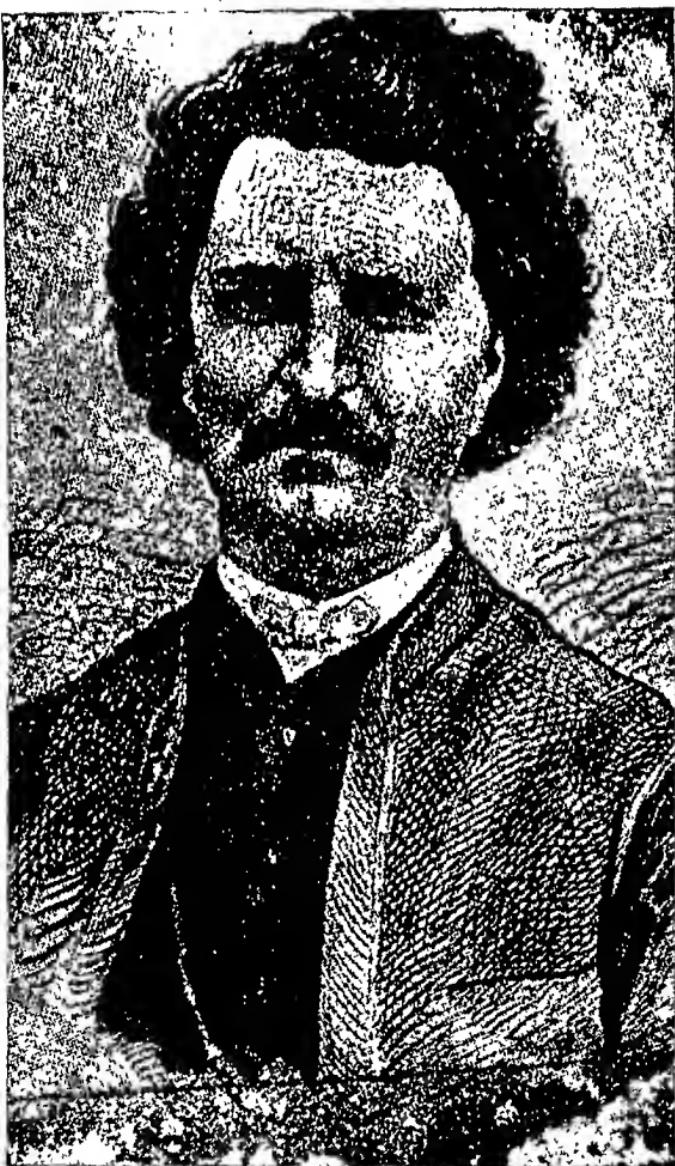
(*In the Royal Ontario Museum*)

I sped with him, as the wild bison herd
He steered so deftly to the [narrowing Pound;
I breathed with him, as eloquent he [stirred
To wrath his painted warriors [gathered round;
His dreams are dead that curled above [this stone :
I muse of him forever here alone.

***FINIS : REGINA, NOVEMBER
16TH, 1885***

Patriot, scheming zealot, would-be saint,
Actor consorted oddly with the fool;
Builder of visions with one just

[complaint,
Calling the Indian for his culprit's
[tool;
By two-fold crime he reaped his sure
[reward :
He chose the way of blood, — his way
[was hard.



LOUIS RIEL

Otter's Column

N. W. M. P.	(1 gun)	50
"B" Battery, R. C. A.	(2 guns)	113
"C" Co., I. S. C.		49
G. G. F. G.		51
Q. O. R.		274
Scouns		6
		<hr/>
	Total	543
		<hr/>
Wagon Train	(202 wagons)	202
		<hr/>
	Grand Total	745

Otter's Force in the Cutknife Fight

N. W. M. P. (50 mounted, 1 gun)	75
"B" Battery, R. C. A.	80
"C" Co., I. S. C.	45
G. G. F. G.	20
Q. O. R. (including Ambulance Corps)	60
Battleford Rifles	45
	<hr/>
	325

1 Gatling Gun
 2 7-Pounders
 48 Wagons

OUTLINE OF THE CAMPAIGN

When Louis Riel and his Halfbreed followers broke into armed rebellion, and defeated the Northwest Mounted Police at Duck Lake on March 26th, 1885, it became evident at once that a large force would be needed to suppress them. There was perhaps also some method in their madness in bringing on the conflict at a moment when they felt themselves able to defy any government forces immediately available in the west, and while winter and the unfinished state of the Canadian Pacific Railway allowed them to think the advent of reinforcements from the east very remote. By that time they might have the Indians on the warpath beside them, as well as the help from across the United States border, which Riel told them was sure to come.

The commander-in-chief of the Canadian forces could speed, as a civilian, from Ottawa to Winnipeg via Chicago, but permission could neither be asked for nor granted for Canadian troops to pass

through United States territory. So there was nothing to do but make the best of it in overcoming independently the enormous difficulties of the route to the west. Winnipeg had responded superbly in promptly furnishing troops, so that on the very day that he arrived in that city General Middleton was able to proceed with a considerable force to establish a base at Qu'Appelle. But the great bulk of the forces needed to suppress the rebellion had to be drawn from east of the north shore of Lake Superior, where several hundred miles of broken line remained in the unfinished Canadian Pacific Railway. The difficulty of overcoming this formidable physical obstacle was increased by the abnormally late winter of 1885, which covered that district with several feet of snow, and, as we passed through in the first week of April, sent the thermometer down to over twenty degrees below zero.

It was only a few days after the start west that we were faced with this, the hardest test of physical endurance of the whole campaign; and so the "North Shore" remains as our most vivid — and un-

hallowed — memory. The first gap in the C. P. R., of forty miles, was covered in bobsleighs, the others on foot across the frozen bays of Lake Superior; on the bumpy railway roadbed between the gaps we rode — and froze! — on flatcars, notably a ninety-mile ride through the night. In spite of difficulties successive bodies of troops from Ontario and eastward pushed through the North Shore with commendable speed. By March 29th, three days after the Duck Lake Fight, mobilized units had begun to move. On April 13th Otter's Column, 745 strong, was able to start north from Swift Current, 2000 miles from Toronto. A week later part of General Strange's Column (which eventually totalled about 1000 men) was on its way north from Calgary, 300 miles farther west. And when General Middleton, on May 9th, engaged the rebels in their final stand at Batoche, he had under his immediate command there a force of 890, while further troops to the number of nearly 2000 held his line of communication and the bases on the C. P. R.

The plan of the military operations was a simple one. From three bases on a 500-

nnile stretch of the Canadian Pacific Railway — Qu'Appelle, Swift Current and Calgary — three columns moved northward to the scene of action. General Middleton commanded the whole, and was in immediate command of the main column operating toward the rebel headquarters at Batoche on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River near its junction with the north branch. Lt-Col. W. D. Otter was in command of the column striking north from Swift Current, with Battleford on the North Saskatchewan as its objective. The third column, under General T. B. Strange, advanced from Calgary to Edmonton and down the North Saskatchewan. The three columns finally converged at Battleford and Fort Pitt.

After the defeat of the main body of the Halfbreed forces at Batoche, and the capture of Riel, General Middleton's Column moved on up the North Saskatchewan to Battleford. Meanwhile, Otter's Column, by a rapid march of 200 miles from Swift Current, had reached Battleford and released 567 persons, large-

ly civilians with women and children, cooped up in the stockaded Fort in which they had taken refuge from the Indians; and Otter, with part of his force, had soon after had a clash with Poundmaker's band at Cutknife Hill, 35 miles west of Battleford. Poundmaker and his chief men surrendered to General Middleton on the latter's arrival at Battleford. Middleton then moved up the river to Fort Pitt. By this time General Strange had marched the 200 miles from Calgary to Edmonton and made the further hazardous journey of 300 miles down stream to Fort Pitt, near which place, just before General Middleton's arrival, he had engaged Big Bear's forces at Frenchman's Butte. With Riel and Poundmaker prisoners, and Big Bear's band scattered, the active campaign was now over. Otter's Column struck north from Battleford in an effort to intercept Big Bear; but the dispirited old Chief, having left his band in the hope of escaping alone across the border, was captured by the Police near Carlton. The rebellion suppressed, there remained only the journey home of two thousand miles, —

this time by 850 miles down the Saskatchewan and across Lake Winnipeg to Selkirk, then by rail and steamer to points farther east.

These versified memories appeared in The Canadian Military Journal in 1947 and a few stanzas referring to the North Shore Passage appeared in Saturday Night (Toronto).

